

Something Extra EP 013 – Judy West

Lisa Nichols: Judy, I'm so excited to have you on the show today. I've just come to admire, respect you as not only a leader but also as a friend and as a confidant. I'm excited for our listening audience to hear your story today. Let's jump right in. Let's talk about your background. I know you grew up in the east coast. Talk to us a lil bit about that. Family background? How you grew up? I know that you are a star athlete and still are, and talk a lil bit about that.

Judy West: Raised in small town in Pennsylvania. I would say probably out of everything in my life, running helped define who I am today. It was actually a middle school PE teacher that saw me run the mile that called me into high school sports. Would you try distance running? At that point, no I want to be cool, cheerleader or something. He convinced me, would you at least give it a shot. Would you try cross country? Which is 3.1 miles outside on grass. My 3rd race and I won. Went 45-0 my high school career. Ended up being a Pennsylvania state champion in outdoor track. I would say, hands down, that's what gave me the confidence to start leading. That really set me on a trajectory to run division 1 in college. It was a small university. Becknell but it was still division 1. Ran there. Was 11 time east coast conference champion. Met my sweetheart there, Steve. He was an academic all American. We got married there at our chapel at our university. Running has really important part of my leadership. Got to experience it now. I was the first student athlete to sit on a title 9 committee. I was the student athlete selected to pick our new athletic director. A lot of leadership opportunities came through running. I was the president of mortarboard at Becknell which is the national leadership honorship and service society. It's just been a blessing to watch how running has been a part of that leadership journey for me.

Lisa: I just know that a lot of great leaders were former athletes. Enterprise rent a car.

Judy: They hire athletes.

Lisa: We love them. They're a great client of ours. Talk to us a lil bit about that? What do you think the psychology is there?

Judy: I know what it is. I've lived it. So much of sport is discipline. You have to be disciplined especially in a solo sport like running. Often times you don't have teammates to rely on, to hold

you accountable. It's that discipline to get up when it's 12 degrees outside, strap on your shoes and go for a run. A lot of it is discipline, dedication. My dad always told me growing up, 99% of it is mental. Period. 1% is talent. Most athletes that make it, it is literally the mental game. Can you breakthrough the hard times? Can you strap on the running shoes? Can you just break through those, The emotional mental barriers to be the athletes? That's a lot of why places, corporations like enterprise alone, go after the NCAA athlete because they know that's part of their makeup, their DNA.

Lisa: and they have a great work ethic, they know how to work hard.

Judy: Work ethic follow through, a lot of character building, strong character. Lots of times, you'll find athletes with a sense of humility because you've had to experience loss. You've got to learn how to navigate loss. You have to learn how to navigate loss. Most athletes don't make it through because you can't win everything. You can't set a personal record every time you run. You can't win every game. A lot of athletes learn how to navigate loss.

Lisa: You have to develop that mental toughness because loss can be loss. You grieve over that, right? You can go either way. You can either pick yourself up by the bootstraps or jump in the saddle again or not. That's interesting. I know that you eventually, led a group of 1000 runners. You started a women's running group?

Judy: Back in the day, when we first moved to STL. I had my first baby. I got a call from a former teammate from Becknell. Would you be willing to train for the Hood to Coast relay? It's in Oregon It's the longest relay in the world. We all had to be able to run 3 times about 6 miles. I had to be ready to run about 21 miles in 6 minute pace. I walked my next door neighbor. I will teach you how to run. This is a 40 year old mom. I will teach you how to run if you train with me. Word got out that Judy West was training middle aged women how to run and started team Windsor. I did that for 9 years, ended up being 1 of the nation's women running and walking groups. Did that for 9 years. Went into retirement for a few years. Then, with our affiliation through the church, living water international. Then I coached, started team living water. That is what I coached for 6 years. Trained about 1000 runners to run a half marathon and 5k as well. We raised over half a million dollars for the clean water movement. That's my true passion with running. To take somebody who doesn't think they'd ever be able to do it, to stand at the finish line. At the STL half marathon and to watch hundreds of people cross the finish line. That's better than any gold medal I could ever win especially, when the recipients were folks that need clean water. That's my joy to lead that.

Lisa: That's so awesome. I do want to talk about that more. What was your degree in? Can you talk to us a lil bit about your education background?

Judy: I received my undergrad in sociology and my master's degree in education with the specialty in elementary and secondary guidance counseling.

Lisa: Did you practice?

Judy: Before we moved here, I was an elementary school guidance counselor, outside of Philadelphia for year. Our school district by the way, we had the first child with HIV. I was in the heat of the moment trying to figure out in the early 90s how to deal with the stigma of HIV and AIDS in the school district. It was pandemonium. It was in PA. With had the first kids in the US and had to navigate that. I learned a lot. That was the school of hard knocks through all that. Then we moved here, that's when my story took off in STL.

Lisa: I want to back up a minute. I want to talk about your sweetheart Steve. He is a Doctor correct?

Judy: He graduated with a biology degree in Becknell and went to the university in PA. Medical school in Philadelphia. When we matched for residency, we ended up matching here.

Lisa: I'm so glad. Talk to us a lil bit about your other treasures. Your 2 children.

Judy: Yes. Jordan came out of the womb as an athlete. The kid was shooting basketballs by age 2. He was into soccer. He eventually, we asked him, by your sophomore in high school, would you at least try running? He fell in love with the sport. Ended up running for a local high school. Lafayette high school. Went and ran division 1 for Baylor University. Right now, he's a grad assistant coach for Baylor for cross country and track. Anna, on the other hand, she's my story. I'm going to write about her one day. She never got off the couch. We kept looking at each other, whose child is this? She never played with a doll. Never colored. Never played sports. Would do nothing. Finally by her freshman year in high school. We told her you have to do something. We don't care if it's the chess club. You have to do something. Her brother said, Anna, just try running. Would you join me on the Lafayette team, within 3 months She was on the state podium. She's a 4 time state champion. Now, she's at the University of Michigan and were at the top podium at NCAA. 4th place. It's incredible just watching these young little

emerging leader woman go from the couch to now a multi-state champion and division 1 award winner.

Lisa: I definitely think there's a book in there. From the couch to the podium. There's several things running through my mind. One of the things that I think is the common thread. You had a gym teacher that saw something in you that you didn't even see in yourself. That gym teacher saw something in you and really spoke words into you that you should try this. I'm thinking about Jordan speaking into Anna. Try this. How important is it to have people in your life that actually speak those words of life to you?

Judy: First of all, highest respect for teachers and coaches because often times, they have more hours in the day with a child than sometimes parents do. They see different talents and gifts sometimes than a parent does. When you take time to call out greatness in a kid, you have no idea the legacy that could leave and the impact you could have. Because that was so crucial for me, that's part of my leadership here. That's why I teach leadership class here. Every single human was somehow given gifts and talents, if you can help them figure out what that is, it could be life changing, game changer. My coach in college, called it the eye of the hunter. You always need to be looking at the eye of the hunter to look for the greatness. I've had that in my brain my whole life. It doesn't matter what to find that. What's interesting is, you said Jordan, a part of his DNA is that. The Lafayette boys ended up winning championships in Missouri. Almost every kid was recruited by Jordan West. I had parents come up and say to me, my kid is who is he is because of Jordan West. My kid can call out greatness in somebody else, that's a victory.

Lisa: I think that's one of the major tenants of a leader. To bring out the best in people and help them be the best version of themselves. Let's talk about, you had this educational background. You worked in Pennsylvania. How did you go from corporate to church work?

Judy: Back in Pennsylvania. I had a stint as a division 1 coach. I got that experience, I was the guidance counselor. We moved here. To make a long story short, I'll give your listeners a little nugget of it. By the time we moved here from Philly, folks refer to me now as the feminazi atheist f-bomb dropping crazy woman from Philadelphia. We moved here and very anti god. Anti-church. Thought Christians were wackadoodles. Was really lost in seeking something. Was invited to this brand new startup church called the crossing. I went and it was the very first place where they let me ask anything I wanted. Who wrote the bible? How do I trust it? What about dinosaurs? What about homosexuality? What about women's rights? What about evolution? Didn't scare them They never laughed. They never judged me. They never rolled their eyes. I

didn't realize there was so much evidence behind the Christian faith. I thought it was a bunch of fairy tales. I didn't realize the historical evidence the manuscript evidence after 8 months, there was so much evidence, I ended up giving my life to Jesus. The story took off from there. It was my next door neighbor that ended up being the pastor here and invited me in. He knew my leadership background. He knew my running background. My counseling, my coaching background. He had that eye of the hunter and said there's something in her for leadership development. I was the first lateral hire at the crossing. If you think of silos in a corporation or a church, in church there's kids' ministry, youth ministry, music stuff like that outreach. I was the first lateral hire that came through as leadership glue to hold everything together. He had enough insight an enough moral courage to ask the board of directors at that time. Can I take a risk? On this former atheist, now Jesus follower to come on board. That was 20 years ago. I just celebrated my 20th year here. What was great, I was allowed to mature as the church matured and as it grew.

Lisa: I love it Judy. I cannot wait to hear. There has been explosive growth here. You have seen it grow from very small to explosive. I want the listening audience to hear about that.

AD: Let's take a quick break and we'll be right back with Judy West.

Lisa: We had a little cliffhanger there. I want you to tell our listening audience. You started when the crossing had what 8 members?

Judy: It started with 8 member in the living room in 1991. We moved here in 1994 right when they started their first public services at Marquette high school. By that time, when I walked through the doors, there was probably 50-100 people. It was still very tiny.

Lisa: Talk about the here to there. Now we have multi sites?

Judy: That was 1994, now we have 4 campuses plus online. Average weekend attendance is right around 8000. Big holidays, Christmas, Easters, around 20000. About 150 staff members. It has been a ride. Starting from a small organization to a multi-site organization. It has changed everything about us. Our DNA, structures, leadership. Your listeners know who've been part of corporate growth, a church setting doesn't matter what. When you go from something that small to this big, it changes your leadership. It has to.

Lisa: Talk about some of those things. What were some of the things that, were some of the first things that had to change and evolve as you guys were growing?

Judy: I would say, our lead pastor from the very beginning, was very strategic with who he put around himself. That goes back to John Maxwell's the law of the inner circle. He was very strategic. Didn't put the same voices. Wanted a diversity of voices, ages, and backgrounds. I think key leaders know that diversity and who you put in that inner circle defines your potential. From very early on, he was very discerning about that.

Lisa: You hear that all the time with companies now. The buzz is diversity and inclusion. I believe you. I do believe that diversity of thought that comes from various experiences and backgrounds, gender, race, age, all of those things it's incredibly important. What do you see? You guys have certainly done that at the crossing.

Judy: Really early on, as a leader, you have to be strategic or it just doesn't happen. You know that. If you don't invite people to the table, it doesn't happen. People will migrate to their own people groups. Their own groups. It doesn't matter what group you put in there. It's really being strategic, once again, the eye of the hunter. Going out and saying, I see something in you, would you come to the table? I need you. That's what Greg did, very early on. Lots of times, it takes risk. Especially for your listeners that don't know the church world very well. There are denominations. There is other things where women aren't allowed to have a voice because scriptures been misinterpreted. For him very early on to say, nope, we're going to unpack and figure out what scripture says and will invite women to the table. He took risks. I was one of those that he invited to the table.

Lisa: I'm glad he did. Talk to us, Is there anything else that you want to highlight that you guys had to change and evolve as the church was growing?

Judy: Risk taking is number 1. You can't be afraid of failure. We would ready, fire, aim, that whole concept. We didn't have a problem acknowledge our failures, and burying the dead cows in the backyard. I know a lot of people are afraid to bury dead cows. We very early on, embraced boundaries. Part of that was having to say no to people, events, to really good things. We knew to make the long haul, we had to have a focus and not say yes to everything and that is so hard to do. Especially when it's really good stuff. Had to keep that focus, those were some of the biggies. Timing was everything. There were often times where we'd be presented with an opportunity and we would have to do the not now. Hold on... now! Timing was crucial to us.

Momentum buy in. All those key basic leadership things, were really important. Also, that's where the EQ came into it too. When you talk about, your inner circle. Part of it was assessing was trying to asses, who has a high EQ? As you now know, with organizational health, EQ can make or break your organization. It's so important to have that.

Lisa: You kind of touched on something and want to dig a lil bit further into that. What do you see, as something that unique challenges that women face in leadership? You can talk from your own experience. All women face some unique challenges. I want to hear what you think.

Judy: One of my dear friends and mentors, Katie, just wrote a book and it's coming out in a few months on this topic. She interviewed hundreds of women around the nation. I was one of the people she interviewed. Some of the unique challenges are stuff where you face every day. It's silly little things like, I've been to executive pasture meetings where I'm 1 of 2 women in the room. You're not even talked to. You're not addressed. When you are, its little things like how are your children? They don't think of asking you leadership questions. You don't want to ram your way into the conversation but you almost have to, to be in a world where sometimes more man heavy than woman is heavy.

Lisa: I'd like to say, you need to be assertive.

Judy: Right, respectfully assertive.

Lisa: Not one for aggressive.

Judy: It is silly little things. This is one thing she quoted from me on the book. I'm 5 foot tall and half of an inch. Its little things like when I go on a meeting, I have to wear heels so I can even look at somebody's chin. It is silly little things like that that you don't even think of. Little things like when I leave a meeting. Most men, don't have to scan the parking lot to see if it's safe. When I leave a meeting at night, there's been times, due to security issues. I have to be escorted to my car. My husband doesn't think of things like that. There's little things that will often times, women have to think about that I think men take for granted. A lot of my role now is helping educate men on those things, so they don't take it for granted. They help other women get incorporated into leadership in an effective way.

Lisa: I know that you are an advocate for women. That's brings me to another question. You do some volunteering for a safe house for girls that have been rescued from sex trafficking. Can you talk a lil bit about that? Such an important issue.

Judy: It all started with one of my heroes. I was teaching a class here. A woman came up and asked if she could speak to me. She had questions about the bible and about dinosaurs. That's our little joke now. It was really interesting, why is this woman asking me about dinosaurs in the bible? What it came down to was, are you a safe person? I now need to tell you what I do for a living. What she had to tell me, that she was selling herself. Conversation after conversation, just the coolest things happened. She now ended her life of prostitution and being on the streets. She's now happily married. I got to help at her wedding. It' set me on a trajectory and because her and a lot of people, women that come to our doors, abused, raped as children. She was 6 years old and a crossing guard, a lot of the women would never ever know they were in the industry. They were being trafficked. You wouldn't know from external appearances. It really set me on a trajectory to figure out how I can serve those not only impacted by the industry and human trafficking but also now where my big passion is to figure out to be on the proactive end. Because, the average buyer is a married man with 2 kids that fill our churches, our organizations, corporate America. That comes from a place of hurt and woundedness. I'm really trying to figure out. How do we get on the proactive end of this? It's joy and an honor to work with these survivors because they are, heroes.

Lisa: Absolutely. Is there a way that if somebody in our audience said yeah, that resonates with me, I could get behind something like that. How would you suggest that they get involved?

Judy: What we do and The issues is, safe houses, very appropriately screen their volunteers. They have to. A lot of them are under FBI security and stuff. The girls. The women. They have to very appropriately screen. What we ask anybody that expresses an interest, first of all, start by educating yourself. Just go to Netflix. There's wonderful documentaries. Be careful, make sure they're not young eyes in the room when you watch these. There's one called trick that's out right now. It'll make sure you're ready for it. You can now research and do just watch, read articles, stories, educate yourself. What to look for. Those of you listening in STL alone, we're one of the top hubs in the US for trafficking. Any city that has major highways, major sporting team, major conventions. You add the gambling, boats, on top of it, they're major hubs. Please educate yourself. That's what I tell men and women. When you're in an airport, educate yourself. If there's a man with a young woman walking a few steps behind looking down. If

you're at the gas station, I've pulled up alongside of cars and followed cars and reported to the police because I saw suspicious activity.

Lisa: It's better to report if it looks suspicious.

Judy: It's better to report. Make sure you educate yourself, because it's a very misunderstood tragedy right now. A lot of people think that survivors of human trafficking have been kidnapped. That's absolutely false, we're working with a woman right now. It's a woman in her 40s. She fell in love with a guy, they were dating for a year. No signs, nothing. He says, honey let's go to Mexico on vacation. Takes her to Mexico. Drugs her. For 2 years, she's held hostage in captivity. This was a guy she loved. Was going to marry. Drugs her and traffics her, he leaves her there. She ends up saying I can't survive this. In a hotel, goes to jump out of the window because a guy thinks she's a prostitute, hires her. He says, what are you doing? She says, I'm being trafficked, he helps her escape back to the US. It's just being uneducated. She had to sit and say I'm not a prostitute for hire. I'm being trafficked right now. What I tell folks all the time is, know what to look for. You could help this crisis if you knew what to look for.

Lisa: Judy, there are a lot of great things going on around this issue. Why did you decide to pick up the organization to work with that you are working with?

Judy: First of all, you're right. It's one of the big things going on in the US right now. Fighting human trafficking. There's great organizations in STL. We talk to a lot of them. The one we picked, literally, goes back to leadership. We loved their leaders. We saw a lot of traits in a leader that we were drawn to. That goes back to the inner circle. I was looking for those people that I would feel comfortable in my own inner circle that I would feel comfortable working with.

Lisa: Let's talk about a lil bit about something extra. What do you believe the something extra is in leaders that are leading that organization?

Judy: It all goes back to that inner circle. Something extra for me, is those leaders that have the keen awareness and wisdom to invite people into their inner circle. When I teach this concept, you have to know, what are you looking for? If you don't know what you're looking for, you're settle for yuck. A lot of it is, for my inner circle, I'll speak for me, and Lisa, I'd love your thoughts too. It's people that are trustworthy, that can keep confidences, they don't gossip, they follow through. They ask curious questions. I look for folks in my inner circle when crisis happens, they don't ramp up. Instead, they calm down. They don't panic. One of my top key indicators is if I'm

going to something rough, at the end of the conversation, they've given me hope instead of doubt and confusion. You know immediately, when you're talking to somebody, at the end of the conversation. If you leave feeling a step forward, instead of step back. That's a key indicator if they should be in your inner circle.

Lisa: I love that. That's great thing for all of us to remember. As we are conversing with people and having these crucial conversations. We need to always be focus on leaving people better than we found them.

Judy: I was teaching this in Africa, they call it PDS. The pull Down syndrome. All these women leaders, 400 leaders we're talking about. They're trying not to pull PDS people into their inner circle. Those folks end up making you feel worse and that's impacts your leadership and influence.

Lisa: You said, sometimes you'll ask, what traits you want in a leader. That's hard for them, but then you say what traits don't you want.

Judy: I don't want people that gossip. People that talk behind my back. I don't want to people disclose information they're not supposed to.

Lisa: It really boils down to trust. That these people are trustworthy.

Judy: Yes. Sometimes that's hard to assess right out of the gun. Giving baby steps, that's what I tell people. Don't trust them with everything. Trust them with something small and see if they're faithful to that. Hands down, you want to ask for leadership mistakes, number 1 lesson is I invited somebody in to quickly and they weren't either mature enough for it. They couldn't handle it. It came back to bite me in the behind or our organization. That's what I would say, don't be to quick to invite somebody into that inner circle.

Lisa: We say that in hiring. Be slow to hire, and quick to fire. But slow to make sure that you're getting and vetting in that person before you invite them in. That's really great advice. As we wrap up, one of the things we haven't talked about. This is really a church that attracts corporate leaders. I'm one of them. We've got Boeing here and Enterprise and Monsanto. We've got a lot of these corporate leaders. For our listening audience out there, that wants to learn more about leadership and leadership development. We're doing a lot of those things. Can you talk a little bit about that? And how they can get plugged in.

Judy: 1st of all I direct everyone to thecrossing.church website. We have groups and classes. I teach a leadership class alone. We have financial classes. Emotional and spiritual health. We have corporate leaders come here and take a class. You can always take it online that deals with conflict resolution, and boundaries. I've lost count how many corporate leaders principles have taken the class. It's changed their organization. We really feel called to invest in leaders and the community. I would say, if you want any more information, go to the website. You can also email info@thecrossing.church. Ask for me, Judy West. I would love to help resource you.

Lisa: Thank you, This has been so much fun. It's been great.

Judy: Thank you Lisa, It's such an honor.